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UA12/2/1/2 Halloween Special for Director

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Former student gives parents credit.

John Carpenter knows scary. It's his job.

Images of blood-splattered knives and maniacs behind bushes penetrate the psyche of his audience.

But John Carpenter is just a guy . . . Just a guy who gets paid to make you look over your shoulder.

And next Friday, he will be inducted as one of Western's Distinguished Alumni.

But he's not taking full credit for this honor.

"I'm extremely proud to be honored as a Distinguished Alumni because of my father," he said.

During Carpenter's childhood, his father, Howard, taught and headed Western's music department. Carpenter, now 51, credits his father for instilling a passion for art and music in him at an early age.

Carpenter's resume, including directing and writing such films as the 1978 seminal slasher "Halloween," "Big Trouble in Little China," and his latest film, "John Carpenter's Vampires," are more than enough to select him as a Distinguished Alumni, said Jill Blythe, Associate Director of the Alumni Association.

"Because of his outstanding movie career, as a writer and director . . . He obviously has excelled in his field," she said.

Although Carpenter considers himself a "full-fledged Californian," he has roots in Bowling Green. He lived and grew up on what is now part of Western's campus, in the small wooden house nestled between Rodes-Harlin Hall and Kentucky Street.

Bennie Beach, Student Activities and Organizations Coordinator, grew up here in Bowling Green alongside Carpenter. They both attended elementary and high school together on the Hill, and both their fathers worked in the music department. Beach has known Carpenter so long that he still refers to him as "Johnny."

"I've never known anybody that should be doing exactly what they are doing more than Johnny," he said. "He's been doing it since he was a little kid."

Some of Carpenter's earliest movies involved Beach and some friends making monster movies on Saturday afternoons.

Another of the budding filmmaker's actors was Bowling Green attorney Steve Todd. "We were playing and having fun," he said. "I guess John had more in mind that we did."

Not only did Carpenter show an interest in movie making at an early age, but he was also developing his love for music.

Through high school, Carpenter put his keyboard skills to work in a garage band, "Kaleidoscope," along with Beach.

After graduation, Carpenter became a Hilltopper.

"I was a Western student for two years," Carpenter said. "As I remember it, the only two classes that completely puzzled me were Geography and Astronomy."

But it was the call of the West Coast, and his dream of making movies, that drew him to film school at the University of Southern California in 1968.

"My transition from growing up in Bowling Green to living and studying in Los Angeles was a minor culture shock at the time," he said. "But I quickly adapted to this brave new world I'm still residing in after 31 years."

It only took 10 years for him to find fame with "Halloween." Carpenter wrote, directed, and like many of his films, wrote the score for the very successful movie. Right now, he's working on a science-fiction project for Columbia Pictures.

Even after years of success in the film industry, Carpenter still remembers how important his time at Western was.

"I wouldn't trade my two years at WKU because I had the time to solidify my commitment to become a motion picture director," he said. "It was an internal process, and by the time I arrived in L.A. in August of 1968, I was ready."

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